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## Project Summary

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### Over-Snow Vehicle Use Designation - Project Summary and FAQs

On February 8, 2019, the Tahoe National Forest released the Draft Over-Snow Vehicle Use Designation Record of Decision (Draft Decision) and Final Environmental Impact Statement (Final EIS). The Draft Decision and Final EIS were originally scheduled to be released on January 4, 2019, but were delayed due to the recent lapse in government funding.

The Draft Decision designates areas on the Tahoe National Forest for cross-country, over-snow vehicle travel and specific snow trails for over-snow vehicle use, some of which are available for grooming. Specifically, the designation allows for:

- Cross-country, over-snow vehicle\* travel on 410,703 acres of Tahoe National Forest managed lands when there is adequate snow depth to avoid damage to natural and cultural resources. Over-snow vehicle enthusiasts can continue to recreate in popular wintertime areas including Sierra Buttes/Lake Basin, Robinson Flat, Donner Summit, Yuba Pass, Carpenter Ridge, White Rock Lake, and other locations.
- Up to 34 over-snow vehicle crossings of the Pacific Crest National Scenic Trail.
- Continued grooming on over 247 miles of over-snow vehicle trails where there is 12-18 inches of snow. This includes popular trails such as the Sierra Buttes, Yuba Pass, China Wall, and Little Truckee Summit trail networks.
- 135 additional miles of non-groomed, over-snow vehicle trails located outside of cross-country, designated areas. This includes 53 miles of easements crossing private property. These trails will be subject to the same snow-depth requirement as cross-country, designated areas or, where there is an underlying Tahoe National Forest System road, a 6 inch snow depth requirement.

Formal opportunities for public comment regarding the Over-Snow Vehicle Use Designation have passed.

For more information please see the Frequently Asked Questions (FAQs), attached. Additional details, including the entire Draft Decision, the Final EIS, the Legal Notice, and project maps can be found at <https://www.fs.usda.gov/project/?project=45914>.

\* For Class-1 OSVs including snowmobiles, tracked motorcycles, snow-cats, tracked all-terrain vehicles (ATVs) and tracked utility terrain vehicles (UTVs).

## **Over-Snow Vehicle Use Designation Frequently Asked Questions (FAQs)**

**Q:** *For cross-country use designation, what is “adequate snow depth to avoid damage to natural and cultural resources?”*

**A:** As a guideline to avoid damaging resources, a minimum of 12 inches of moderate to heavy density, uncompacted snow is generally needed. Sierra storms typically have a moderate to high water content. Snow water equivalency (SWE) is also an indicator for avoiding damage to resources. An SWE of 4 inches can be a reasonable baseline for avoiding resource damage.

On designated OSV trails with underlying roads (non-groomed), a minimum of 6 inches of uncompacted snow is typically needed to avoid damage to the underlying road surface.

**Q:** *What is the basis for the 12-18 inch snow-depth requirement for trails designated available for grooming?*

**A:** The California State Parks’ Off-Highway Motor Vehicle Recreation Division snow depth standards for grooming is currently 12 to 18 inches of snow. Much of the grooming of over-snow vehicle trails on the Tahoe National Forest is accomplished through grants from California State Parks. Thus, adherence to the state snow-depth standard is mandatory to accomplish grooming activities.

**Q:** *I commented on the Draft EIS in 2018. Where can I see the response to my comments?*

**A:** The Tahoe National Forest received over 2,200 comment letters in response to the Draft EIS. The content of all comments was read, considered in the development of the Draft Decision, and entered into the project record. Responses to public comments were categorized and organized by seven general topics and seventy-four subtopics and are documented in Appendix H (FEIS Volume III). Each comment was assigned a unique identifier number. Appendix H contains an alphabetical list of commenters and the identifier number assigned to each comment. To find your unique identifier number, your comment, and the response, view Appendix H (Volume III of the Final EIS) located at <https://www.fs.usda.gov/project/?project=45914>.

**Q:** *Can I object to the Draft Record of Decision?*

**A:** The draft decision is subject to two different objection processes because it includes both a project-level decision as well as a Forest Plan amendment decision.

Individuals or entities who have submitted timely, specific written comments about the proposed project during any designated opportunity for public comment are eligible to file an objection on the project.

Individuals or entities who have submitted substantive formal comments related to the plan amendment during the opportunities for public comment are eligible to file an objection on the forest plan amendment portion of the Project.

For complete instructions on objection eligibility and how to object, please see the Tahoe NF OSV Project Opportunity to Object Legal Notice at <https://www.fs.usda.gov/project/?project=45914>.

**Q:** *Were there changes made to the Selected Alternative between the Draft EIS and the Final EIS?*

**A:** In response to comments and public involvement, there were a number of changes made to the selected Alternative between the Draft EIS (April, 2018) and the Draft Decision/Final EIS (February,

2019). For details regarding changes to the Selected Alternative please see the Final EIS, Volume I, pp. 24 -25 at <https://www.fs.usda.gov/project/?project=45914>. A few of the key changes include:

- Expanding areas designated for cross-county, over-snow vehicle use in the
  - Donner Lake Interchange area
  - Granite Flat area (west of HWY 89).
- Not designating over-snow vehicle use in
  - Fisher Lake and its watershed
  - A 300-500 foot zone near the ridgeline adjacent to Tinkers knob.
  - Tahoe National Forest parcels adjacent to Frog Lake
- Adding designated snow trails (not available for grooming) outside of designated cross-county, over-snow vehicle use areas.
  - Several OSV trails across private lands where the Tahoe National Forest holds easements.
  - Sawtooth Snow Trail
  - Cabin Creek access
  - Carpenter Ridge access
- Changing OSV Class from width basis to ground pressure basis (pounds per square inch -psi), which will be indirectly determined by vehicle type
  - Class 1 OSVs: These are vehicles that typically exert 1.5 psi or less. This includes snowmobiles, tracked motorcycles, snow-cats, tracked ATVs, and tracked UTVs.
  - Class 2 OSVs: These are OSVs that typically exert over 1.5 psi. This includes tracked 4WD SUVs and tracked 4WD trucks.
- Changing the amount, and type, of Pacific Crest National Scenic Trail (PCT) crossings. More PCT crossings were added based on public comment.

**Q:** *Why are there designated crossings of the Pacific Crest National Scenic Trail (PCT)?*

**A:** Approximately 99 miles of the PCT traverse the Tahoe National Forest. Of that, 76 miles of the PCT are on National Forest System lands. OSV use on the PCT is prohibited by the National Scenic Trails Act, P.L 90-543, Section 7(c). To provide a legal opportunity to cross the PCT, the Draft Decision provides 34 designated OSV crossings of varying crossing widths. The purpose of these crossings is to allow OSV users to get across the PCT in situations where OSV use is designated in areas located on either side of the trail.

**Q:** *How are over-snow vehicle users supposed to cross the PCT?*

**A:** Of the 34 designated PCT crossings, fourteen crossings will utilize underlying roads identified on the Tahoe National Forest's Motor Vehicle Use Map and will be the width of the underlying road (approximately 14 feet).

Twenty OSV crossings of the PCT will not utilize underlying roads and will range in width up to a 1/4 mile. These wider crossings are located where snow conditions are highly variable such as areas prone to

wind loading of snow and the formation of cornices. These wider crossings give OSV users options to select a safe crossing of the PCT.

In all cases, OSV users would be required to cross the PCT at 90 degrees, or as close to 90 degrees as is safe to cross, to minimize the time and distance needed to cross the trail. Additionally, OSV users would be required to cross the PCT at the designated location, or as close to the designated location as is safe. These situational variance allowances for the PCT designated crossings were added to the Draft Decision/Final EIS based on comments to the Draft EIS, and are designed for the safety of OSV users in highly variable snow conditions.

***Q:** How many acres were previously designated for over-snow vehicle use before this process? Why has this amount changed?*

**A:** Before this Over-Snow Vehicle Use Designation process, 636,000 acres were available for over snow vehicle use according to the Tahoe National Forest Land and Resource management Plan.

The largest factor that accounts for decreases in OSV designated use acreage is elevation and adherence to the Travel Management Rule's Subpart C Regulations.

Subpart C regulations state – "Over-snow vehicle use on National Forest System roads, on National Forest System trails, and in areas on National Forest System lands shall be designated...where snowfall is adequate for that use to occur, and, if appropriate, shall be designated by class of vehicle and time of year..."

Based on decades of managing and monitoring OSV use on the Tahoe NF, it is rare that there is consistent snow coverage to provide OSV opportunities under 5,000 foot elevation. Therefore, areas under 5,000 feet in elevation were generally not considered "adequate" for managed OSV use and were generally not included in the selected Alternative –**which accounts for over 145,000 acres previously designated as available for over-snow vehicle use.**